

How does Federal Funding happen for VAWA programs and how can YOU make a difference?

The Budget process and the Appropriations process are very connected, but the distinctions are important to understanding the federal funding process. The Budget process creates a non-binding **Budget Resolution** (an outline of how much total money is available) while the Appropriations process later in the year creates the final, binding, **Congressional Budget** (divvying up the actual money) for that fiscal year.

The Congressional Budget process begins with consideration of the **President's Budget Request**. (Believe it or not, the President's Budget is developed almost a whole year in advance, so you may hear from us about advocacy for *next* year's President's Budget at the same that we're working on Appropriations!)

Kicking off the Budget and Appropriations process each year in February, the President presents a Budget Request for the following fiscal year. This is the first step in the year-long appropriations process. The end result of the budget and appropriations process is a Congressional Budget which usually differs quite significantly from the President's Budget. For Fiscal Year 2008, however, the President was adamant that Congress adhere to his overall budget numbers – and not increase his proposed budget total. This meant that Congress was forced to cut funding to programs to meet the President's budget request.

In this context, it is important for advocates to tell Congress how the President's Budget request would impact their programs and victims.



Key Terms for the Budget and Appropriations Process

Authorizations vs. Appropriations

When a bill is passed, it **authorizes** the Appropriations Committee to spend a certain amount on a given program. That authorization is more of a guideline. Congress can appropriate **less**, they can appropriate **more**, they can **refuse to fund** it at all, and they can appropriate money for programs that have long since expired.

This is true of all “discretionary” grant programs, like VAWA. However, not all government spending is discretionary.

Mandatory vs. Discretionary Spending

Mandatory programs are big “entitlement” programs – like food stamps and Medicaid. The amount of money to be spent on them is set when those programs are initially *authorized.* **These programs do not go through the Appropriations process.** They receive that authorized amount every year.

This means there is only one way for Congress to cut spending for those programs – have the *Authorizing* committees agree to cut them back.

Don't the Budget Resolutions threaten to cut mandatory programs sometimes?

Yes. This is one reason we ask you to make calls as Congress works on the Budget Resolution. The Budget Resolution can cut mandatory spending by telling the *Authorizing* committees that they have to cut a certain amount out of those mandatory programs.

Recent Budget Resolutions included cuts to mandatory spending, which means the social services on which many victims of domestic violence rely would be reduced. Thanks to grassroots action, those cuts were less than they could have been.

Tax cuts are another form of “mandatory spending”. They can be attached to the Budget Resolution. The Budget Resolution cannot be filibustered, so it’s a good place to put a controversial tax cut.

What is the Budget Resolution’s Effect on Discretionary Spending?

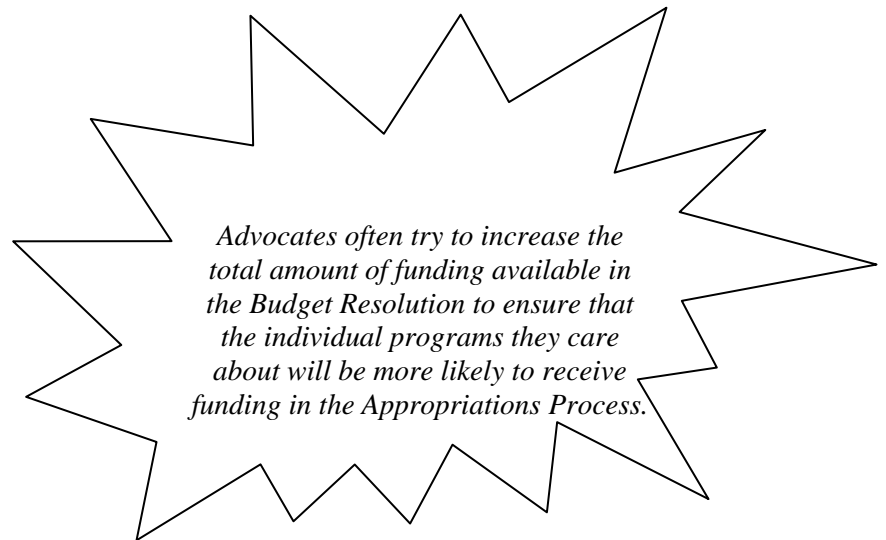


The Budget Resolution has a significant impact on the Appropriations process, because it sets the amount of money available for discretionary grant programs like VAWA.

Think of all federal spending as a pie – the Budget sets the size of the pie, and the Appropriations Committee divides that pie into slices. It allocates a total pot of money that can be spent by the Appropriations Committee later in the year. The Appropriations Committee then decides how much money each program should get, keeping the total pot of funding in mind. Programs that are a priority will be protected, while those that are not will get cut.

What does this mean?

For example, the Budget may say Congress can spend \$60 billion on Health programs. That means the Appropriations Committee can choose to spend that money however it likes, but it can't spend more than \$60 billion. If Congress spent more than \$60 billion on Health programs during the previous year, the Appropriations Committee will have to make cuts to discretionary Health programs to meet their Budget.



*Department of
Defense --
Available funds*



*Department of Justice --
Available funds*

The House and Senate Budget Resolutions often wind up looking very different from each other, so they are not always successfully resolved in conference committee (when several House and Senate members negotiate a compromise bill to pass both chambers). For this reason, there is often no final Budget Resolution passed. If there is no Budget Resolution, the previous year’s Resolution is generally in effect.

How the Budget Resolution Does (and Does Not) Control Appropriations and Other Bills

Budget Resolutions are fairly broad-brush and they also include spending outlines for the next 5-10 years. It is all “non-binding” – meaning other committees make the actual choices and could actually ignore the Budget Resolution. However, there are mechanisms for enforcement.

For instance, the Appropriations Committee could decide to ignore their Budget allocations and spend however much they see fit. But if they do that flagrantly, the Budget committee could choose to write their own Appropriations bill – an unpleasant thought.

Bills (including authorizing bills) that ignore the Budget Resolution can be challenged with a “budget point of order.” However, Congress can just vote (you need 60 votes in the Senate on these) to override that point of order and go ahead with the bill. In the House, the Rules Committee can deem a bill “in order” and waive the budget limitations. Because they require a “super majority” of 60 votes in the Senate, Budget points of order are difficult to overcome and Members of Congress try to ensure that their legislation will not be subject to one.

The Appropriations Process

The Appropriations process begins early in the spring, whether or not Congress successfully passes the Budget Resolution. They consider the President’s request for discretionary spending, the total allocations for their subcommittees, what was spent last year, and what their constituents have been requesting.

Within the House and Senate Appropriations committees, there are 13 subcommittees that each writes a bill to fund different agencies within the federal government. The process begins when each subcommittee receives their 302(b) allocation, which is the amount of discretionary funding that they have to allocate to the agencies in their bill – the overall pie that they can later divide in their bill. The 302(b) allocation is based on the total amount of funding in the Budget Resolution, so if this has not passed, the Appropriations committee will often use levels from the previous Budget Resolution.

*Department of Justice
Funding (302(b) allocation) –
The Whole Pie*



*Funding for a VAWA program
administered by DOJ, like STOP
Grants – a Slice of the Pie*

The Appropriations subcommittees spend the spring gathering input on their spending bills. They will hold subcommittee hearings, usually inviting speakers from the agencies in their jurisdiction to talk about the requests made in the President’s Budget.

During this time, members of Congress on the subcommittee give input on their priorities, both for special projects or “earmarks” that benefit their districts, but also for programs that they see as a priority for their constituents. In addition, members who are not on the subcommittee will write letters of request highlighting and even ranking their priorities for funding within each bill. The members of the Appropriations Committee also choose their priorities and submit them to the Chairs and Ranking Members on the Committee.

This is a critical time period to send sign-on letters to the Appropriations subcommittees as well as have individual Members asking for our programs to be a priority. This is why during the spring we ask you to call and write your members of Congress and meet with them. They need to hear from you so that they will prioritize funding for domestic violence programs!

Beginning in the late spring, the appropriators write their bills. The Appropriations bills originate in the House and then go to the Senate. Often the committee will move non-controversial bills like Defense and Military Construction first. They take more time to debate bills such as Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, which contain critical social programs that have to compete for scarce dollars in their bill.

Labor, Health and Human Services



Commerce, Justice, Science



Military Construction



Appropriations Subcommittee Finish Line

As the Appropriations bills move through committee and onto the floor, there may be opportunities to offer amendments to increase funding for specific programs.

Supplemental Appropriations: At some point in the summer (at least once, sometimes more often) Congress will realize it didn't appropriate enough money **LAST YEAR** and will vote on a "supplemental" Appropriations bill. This is one way Congress stays in line with the Budget guidelines but then spends more money anyway. This is most commonly done for the war and other defense spending, but they stick all kinds of pork and unrelated spending onto the supplemental Appropriations bills.

Omnibus Appropriations: Getting it Done!

Sometimes, in order to finish the spending bills, the Congress will pass an "omnibus" that packages some or all of the Appropriations bills together and passes them as a bundle. If the Congress does not pass all of the spending bills by the beginning of the fiscal year, they will pass a stopgap measure called a "Continuing Resolution" or CR. This is a resolution that continues funding federal agencies for a few weeks or months at the level appropriated in the prior fiscal year, giving them more time to finish the process for the new fiscal year.

In rare occasions (like 2006!) the Appropriations bills drag on into the next calendar year.

In the end, the Appropriations bills are voted on by Congress, and after the House and Senate Appropriations bills are reconciled in conference committee, they become the Congressional Budget for that fiscal year. Then, the President must sign it for it to become law. If the President vetoes the bill (as he did for the Fiscal Year 2008 budget) it is sent back to Congress. Congress can attempt a veto override (2/3 of House and Senate must vote to override the President's veto, so this is difficult to accomplish), or they can redraft the bill to meet the President's requests as they did last year.

When does all of this happen?

Timeline of the Budget and Appropriations Process

February
1st Monday

The President proposes a Budget outlining what the Administration would like to see for ALL federal spending – mandatory and discretionary.

The Budget committee considers these requests along with their own priorities and proposes a Budget Resolution.

February &
March

Requests for earmarks are due to the Appropriations Committees. Members of Congress write letters to the Appropriations Committee noting their priorities for funding and making general requests.

Action Alert!

Call Congress to respond to the President’s Budget Request. Send letters to your Members of Congress requesting full funding for VAWA! Call and ask them to sign onto joint letters asking for full funding!

Early Spring

If there is a Budget Resolution passed, it usually occurs in the spring (though it may drag on for months – even into the next year!)

Action Alert!

You may be asked to call Congress to support amendments that would increase the size of the Budget for VAWA programs!

Spring

The Appropriations Subcommittees start writing their bills in the spring, usually before the Budget Resolution passes.

Late Spring/
Early Summer

Subcommittee bills are finished, voted on, then considered by the full Appropriations Committee. *The bills that fund VAWA are usually voted on in July.*

Action Alert!

You may be asked to call Congress to support amendments to increase VAWA funding!

Summer

Congress may vote on one or more “supplemental” Appropriations bills. Funding for VAWA programs is almost never included in these bills.

August

Members of Congress are home for “recess” and traveling through their districts listening to the concerns of their constituents.

Action Alert!

Take advantage of recess and meet with your Senators and Representatives in person – either at “town hall meetings” or by scheduling a visit!

September 30

Congress tries to bring Appropriations bills to the floor before this time because it is the end of the fiscal year. They almost always fail, and continuing resolutions are passed to extend existing funding into the fall.

October/Nov

The Appropriations bills are voted on and go to conference committee. The final Congressional Budget is usually approved shortly before Congress recesses for the year.

Action Alert!

You may be asked to call Congress to support increased VAWA funding in the final Congressional Budget!